

1998 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey

Data Preview VI: Bicycle Use

Following are results from the 1998 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey conducted for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The survey employed 2 questionnaires, each administered by telephone to a national sample of approximately 4,000 randomly selected persons age 16 and older. Interviewing began November 5, 1998, and continued through January 12, 1999. The data are weighted to yield national estimates. Detailed results from the survey will be published later in a series of NHTSA reports.

Riding A Bicycle

Riding a bicycle on icy roads or in the midst of cold or inclement weather is not a pleasant experience. Thus the level of bicycling activity will vary according to the time of year. The Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey primarily focuses on occupant protection issues and is administered between November and January, well outside the peak bicycle riding months. Still, 13% of the population age 16 and older said they had ridden a bicycle in the past 30 days. Another 24% reported riding a bicycle in the past 12 months, though not during the past 30 days.

Riding a bicycle in the past year was more common among males (44%) than females (30%). As expected, the youngest (16-24) age group was most likely to report riding a bicycle (53%), followed by those 25-34 (48%) and those 35-44 (46%).

Wearing A Bicycle Helmet

All respondents who said they rode a bicycle in the past year were asked if they usually wore a bicycle helmet when they rode. About one-quarter (26%) replied "yes." The Table on the back shows this to be an increase compared to several years earlier. Bike riders ages 16-24 were less likely to say they usually wore a helmet (17%) compared to those ages 25-34 (27%) and those 35-44 (27%). The numbers of older bike riders in the sample were too few to analyze separately. As indicated by the above statistics, the youngest age group was most likely to ride a bicycle, but less likely to wear a bicycle helmet compared to their older peers.

Child Riding A Bicycle

If respondents had one or more children ages 4 through 12 living in their household, the interviewer selected one child about whom to ask the respondent a short series of bicycling questions. More than 1100 respondents lived with a child this age, with the vast majority (85%) saying that the child had ridden a bicycle in the past 12 months. The percentage of bike riding children who were reported to have bicycle helmets increased dramatically in the past four years, from 57% in 1994 to 81% in 1998. Yet having a helmet did not necessarily mean that the child usually wore it; more than one in ten of those with a helmet reportedly did not.

Support For Child Helmet Laws

About four-out-of-five persons (82%) supported laws that require children to wear bicycle helmets, similar to results from previous years. Support was slightly higher among females (87%), blacks (87%), and Hispanics (87%). It also was somewhat higher among persons not having children age 12 or younger in their household (84%) compared to those that do (77%).



U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration

Office of Research and Traffic Records
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

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		1998	1996	1994
Have you ridden a bicycle at all during the past (30 days/12 months)?	Yes, Past 30 Days	13%	11%	14%
	Yes, Past 12 Months (but not past 30 days)	24%	28%	21%
	No	63%	61%	65%
	Not Sure/Refused	*	*	*
If yes: Do you usually wear a bicycle helmet when you ride a bike?	Yes	26%	23%	18%
	No	74%	77%	81%
	Not Sure/Refused	*	*	*
**During the past 12 months, has the (child age 4-12) ridden a bicycle?	Yes	85%	79%	80%
	No	15%	21%	19%
	Not Sure/Refused	*	*	1%
If yes: Does he/she have a bicycle helmet?	Yes	81%	76%	57%
	No	19%	24%	42%
	Not Sure/Refused	—	*	1%
Does he/she usually wear it?	Yes	70%	63%	48%
	No	10%	13%	9%
	Not Sure/Refused	1%	1%	1%
	***Don't Have Helmet	19%	24%	43%
Do you favor or oppose laws which require children to wear bicycle helmets?				
Total Population	Favor	82%	81%	79%
	Oppose	12%	13%	14%
	Depends On Age Of Child	1%	1%	1%
	Depends Where They Ride	2%	1%	2%
	Don't Know/Refused	3%	4%	5%
Child Age 12 Or Younger In Household	Favor	77%	79%	73%
	Oppose	15%	14%	17%
	Depends On Age Of Child	1%	1%	1%
	Depends Where They Ride	3%	2%	4%
	Don't Know/Refused	3%	4%	5%
No Child Age 12 Or Younger In Household	Favor	84%	82%	82%
	Oppose	11%	13%	12%
	Depends On Age Of Child	1%	1%	1%
	Depends Where They Ride	2%	1%	1%
	Don't Know/Refused	3%	3%	5%

